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Kontakt/Contact
ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics
Düsternbrooker Weg 120
24105 Kiel (Germany)
E-Mail: *rights[at]zbw.eu*
https://www.zbw.eu/

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Stakeholder Perspectives of Sport Tourism Development in Gabon - A Case Study of the Africa Cup of Nations

Kamilla Swart[1], Tembi M. Tichaawa[2], Joelle-Desiree Odounga Othy[3], Tracy Daniels[4]

Abstract: Sport tourism, and sport tourism events in particular, have been identified as tools for developing nations to stimulate economic development and position themselves as tourist destinations within a global context. In this light, Libreville, Gabon hosted the 38th edition of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) football tournament in 2012. Adding to the growing body of knowledge on the impacts of sport tourism and its development in developing nations, this research sought to explore stakeholder perspectives of sport tourism development in Libreville, Gabon, providing insights into lessons learned through the hosting of the AFCON event and identifying opportunities for the hosting of future mega-events, and for sport tourism development more broadly, in the region. To garner rich and in-depth data, the study employed the qualitative research design, conducting semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in the fields of sport, events, tourism and hospitality. The interviews were then transcribed and data analysed by thematic analysis. Results of the study show that although the AFCON was successfully hosted in Libreville, in order to develop a sustainable sport tourism industry, issues of poor infrastructure, the high cost of tourism in Gabon, a shortage of skills and corruption within government organisations needs to be addressed.

Keywords: sport tourism; development; sport events; Gabon; Confederation of the African Football's Nations Cup

JEL Classification: O55; L83

1. Introduction

This study seeks to determine stakeholder perspectives of sport tourism development in Gabon, Central Africa using the country's hosting of the 2012 Confederation of the African Football's Nations Cup (AFCON) as a case study. Sport events are increasingly used in both developing and developed environments to advance development, particularly with regard to economic growth. (Bob & Swart, 2010) These events are an important part of the sport and tourism industries as they can result in positive modifications to tourism demand on a long-term basis. (Solberg & Preuss, 2007; Roche et al., 2013; Knott & Swart, 2018)

The hosting of sport mega-events has in the past generally been reserved for developed countries with already advanced infrastructure. (Bohlman & van Heerden, 2008) AFCON is a well-known regional football competition which is handled at an organisational level by the Confederation of African Football (CAF). AFCON may be considered as a third-order mega-event due to its continental nature. (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006) The 38th edition of the event was co-organised by Gabon and Equatorial

[1] American University of the Emirates, United Arab Emirates, College of Business Administration and University of Johannesburg, South Africa, School of Tourism and Hospitality, E-mail: kamilla.swart@aue.ae.
[2] University of Johannesburg, South Africa, College of Business and Economics, School of Tourism and Hospitality, E-mail: tembit@uj.ac.za.
[3] Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa, Department of Tourism and Events Management, E-mail: danielst@cput.ac.za.
[4] Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa, Department of Tourism and Events Management, E-mail: desireeodounga@yahoo.fr.

Guinea. Gabon which is located on the west coast of Africa is frequently referred to as an African emirate due to its crude oil production. (Odounga Othy & Swart, 2016) As a result of the crisis affecting the oil industry, sport, tourism and events have been identified as an alternative source of revenue generation for the country which in all likelihood could also be more sustainable.

While the AFCON is certainly the biggest sport event to be hosted by Gabon, the country also hosts numerous other sporting events such as "La Tropicale Amissa Bongo", an international road cycling race held annually. Furthermore, the "Gabon International Marathon" which was hosted in 2003 attracted a fair amount of participants (5000) and spectators. (20000) (Safou, 2013) In 2013 the country also hosted Gabon's Cup of Taekwondo, which attracted approximately 582 spectators. (Ndong, 2013)

Through the hosting of sport events, host countries have a number of objectives and benefits that they would like to achieve Getz (1997) underscores that sport events contribute significantly towards increasing tourist flow and driving economic development in a region. Song (2010) further elaborates that these benefits can include urban renewal, new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure, heightened international standing, improved tourist and visitor arrival figures, job creation, enhanced opportunities for local businesses, corporate relocation and enhanced public welfare. Despite this, there are potential negative impacts of the hosting of sport events on the host country Bohlmann and van Heerden (2008) contest that major sport events can be a negative investment for host nations in the developing world in particular. This study seeks to gain insights into stakeholder perspectives of the development of sport tourism in Libreville, Gabon, using the 2012 AFCON tournament as a case study. Specifically, it aims to understand the factors that encouraged the city of Libreville to organise sport tourism events and the associated opportunities for the host destination. Moreover, it attempts to comprehend the lessons learned from hosting AFCON for the tourism industry in Gabon, and Libreville in particular. In addition, it considers what is required to strengthen the sport event industry in order to better support tourism development in the host destination.

2. Sport Tourism Development

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2017) tourism is one of the largest economic sectors globally, with tourism associated with sport-related travel presenting major opportunities for mature as well as emerging destinations. (UNWTO, 2016) According to Swart and Bob (2007), sport and tourism create significant economic activities for destinations globally and have featured prominently in the development of new relationships between cities, regions and states in terms of international trade, business development, capital investment and job growth. (UNWTO, 2009) The emergence of sport tourism as a niche market necessitates defining the term.

One of the earliest definitions of sport tourism which is still relevant today is that of (Delpy, 1998) who defined it as "travel to participate in a sport activity, travel to observe sport, and travel to visit a sport attraction". Similarly, Gibson (1998) confirms this notion of defining sport tourists' motivations as "watching sporting events, visiting sports-related attractions and active (sport) participation". Given the complex nature of sport tourism, Weed and Bull (2004) broadened the definition of sport tourism by emphasising that it is a social, economic and cultural phenomenon arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place. While the broader definition of sport tourism is acknowledged, this paper particularly focuses on the category of sport tourism events. As highlighted by Fullerton and Mertz (2008) "It is the game or event that represents the [main] product in the

spectator sports market" and has contributed to the emergence of sport events as an important tourism segment.

Getz (1997) highlights that sport events make an important contribution to enhancing tourist flows and stimulating economic development in host destinations. According to Cornelissen and Swart (2006), sport events are considered as means for reviving communities and attracting investment opportunities. Moreover, they are perceived as a marketing tool for host destinations, therefore attracting repeat visits and fuelling the post event economic market. Black (2007) acknowledges that host cities tend to emphasize the event's economic implications, event-related income and the development of tourism. Roche et al. (2013) summarise these economic impacts as short-term spending while visiting a destination in addition to more long-term benefits such as increasing sport tourism-related employment and enhanced destination image which consequently leads to increased visitor numbers in the future. Bob and Swart (2010), presenting a more holistic view, emphasise that sport tourism events are actively pursued by both developed and developing countries as a strategy for further development particularly in relation to economic growth, to positively position a destination and contribute towards improved social cohesion, sport participation and healthy lifestyles.

Black (2007) highlights that sport and tourism have been considered as critical factors for success in both developed and developing destinations. Furthermore, Nauright (2004) states that countries globally are moving towards event driven economies, as events have become a significant element of regenerating and shaping of tourism products. With globalisation reaching new heights, new and exhilarating opportunities are being offered through enhanced sport experiences in order to satisfy the tourist experience. (De Knop, 2004) It is now widely acknowledged that sport events, and mega-events in particular, as a niche tourism market play a significant role in the economy for developing nations; they are valued for their regenerating capabilities, social cohesion and development aspects. (Higham, 2005; Bama & Tichaawa, 2012; Knott & Swart, 2018) Gursoy et al. (2011) assert that mega-events are part of global sport tourism, and it is not surprising that they are being pursued by emerging nations that are seeking heightened visibility and profile within the context of globalisation. (Cornelissen, 2004; Swart, 2017)

Although Matheson and Baade (2004) caution that despite the specialised infrastructure and operating expenses required to host these events are considered substantial, developing countries have become increasingly involved in the bidding and hosting of mega-events in order to share in the economic benefits of these international games. They add that because of this the experience of developing nations with regards to hosting mega-events widely differs from that of developed nations. For instance, the expenditure required for infrastructure such as stadia, new roads, and sport complexes is likely to be significantly higher. While governments generally put forward the triple bottom-line (economic, social and environmental) benefits in support of hosting sport tourism events, and especially mega-events, the negative impacts on host communities should also be considered. (Bama & Tichaawa, 2012; Swart, 2017; Knott & Swart, 2018) Thus, in recent years there has been widespread acknowledgement, advancement and institutionalisation of the function and influence of sport events within the sphere of sustainable tourism development. (Darnell, 2012)

As a system, the integration of sport and tourism services serve as a foundation for strategic planning and policy development by government (Jonker, 2003), as they pursue economic activities for generating infrastructure facilities and services. (Bohlmann & van Heerden, 2005) As reported by the African Economic Outlook (2007), for Gabon, these infrastructure developments and services came as part of the diversification of economic and institutional activities to regenerate new sources of income

for the country during the post oil dependence era. The Gabonese government Strategic Plan for an Emerging Gabon (PSGE) is the country's strategy for critical infrastructure development, which redirects budget policy towards non-oil sectors such as tourism. Sport tourism events such as AFCON are therefore considered to be significant to a range of stakeholders such as policy makers, administrators and communities as they serve to stimulate transformation in host cities. (Preuss, 2015) However, as Tichaawa and Bama (2012) caution their consequent impacts and legacies are resulting in new challenges in the way they are organised in the Global South and the impacts that they may have. Cornelissen (2007) contends that the benefits of hosting sport mega-events can only be truly achieved through effective planning and with a legacy focussed strategy. The focus should be on what the host destination wants to achieve and requires communication between a wide range of event stakeholders. Thus, it is important to elaborate on sport tourism events stakeholders within the context of the 2012 AFCON in Gabon.

3. Sport Tourism Event Stakeholders

Organising sport tourism events, and mega-events in particular, requires the involvement of a diverse set of stakeholders directly and indirectly. Consequently, it is recommended that for the successful implementation of an organisation's planning, implementation and/or outcomes of the product or service; stakeholders must have a mutual appreciation of interests of all persons or groups concerned. (Byrd, 2007; Lewis, 2006) Thus, stakeholder theory attempts to balance "stakeholder interests with competing claims by process of assessing, weighing and addressing interests of those who have a stake in the actions of the organisation". (Stoney & Winstanley, 2001)

Elbe (2009) underscores that the interests of individual stakeholders will to a large extent influence their willingness to mobilise resources and take part in activities associated with the event. Elbe (2009) adds that the identification of stakeholders has been recognised as critical in leveraging mega-events and for destination strategy. Moreover, the 2010 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines (SRG) contend that stakeholder actions and interests should undertake a broad sustainability approach with specific dimensions integrated in economic, social and environmental imperatives. (Global Reporting Initiative, 2011)

It is further contended that all stakeholders should be engaged in a cross-sector policy development model. (Weed & Bull, 2004) This was evident in the planning of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ in Cape Town where it was recommended by Walters (2005) for a joint task team, comprising the tourism and sport departments as well as players from the hospitality field. While Swart and Bob (2007) contend that economic and political transformation are still major objectives of sport tourism in the rest of Africa, they underscore that a successful sport tourism strategy needs to consider several aspects such as financial implications, marketing, regulatory mechanisms, implementation imperatives and the incorporation of a developmental agenda. According to Elbe (2009), the identification of event stakeholders reveals in turn their own stakeholder networks. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the relationship between the two broader sets of stakeholders, viz. the major event organiser and a tourism authority. Furthermore, the following key stakeholders for sport tourism in the context of the host destination have been identified, as discussed next.

Within the linkage of stakeholders, the organiser is central to the process. (Chalip, 2005; Tassiopoulos, 2010) Additionally, Getz, Andersson and Larson (2007) identified the event audience, government agencies, the media and sponsors as key stakeholders. Arcodia and Reid (2002) further

divide event organiser stakeholders into primary (employees, volunteers, sponsors, suppliers, spectators, attendees, and participants) and secondary (government, host community, emergency services, and general business, media, and tourism organisations) stakeholders.

Getz et al. (2007) add that event owners heavily rely on supportive networking to ensure its legitimacy. Furthermore, the organiser plays a key role in ensuring successful execution of the event based on goals set by owners. Major and mega-events such as AFCON can generally be successfully executed through a network of stakeholders who in turn are managed by the event organiser. This usually takes the form of an organising committee (OC) that is established specifically to organise a mega-event within the specific host destination. The OC responsible for organising the 2012 and 2017 AFCON tournament "Comité d'organisation de la coupe d'Afrique des Nations tournament" (COCAN) was responsible for planning, organising and coordinating across governmental departments. (COCAN Gabon, 2017) COCAN further fostered collaboration with several agencies responsible such as the National Infrastructure Agency (ANGT), the Gabonese Agency for the Development and Promotion of Tourism and Hospitality (AGATOUR) and the public investment programme (PIP), amongst others. Getz et al. (2007) assert that government agencies such as city municipalities, provincial tourism authorities and tourism bodies are the regulators and facilitators of events. From existing research it is evident that national government, supportive policies both on a national and local level are critical to sustainable, quality hosting of events. (Goslin, Grundling & Steynberg, 2004)

From an OC perspective, the government is the primary event stakeholder as it presents key aspects of the event; such as legalities, protocol and holding rights, as well as monetary, human and physical resources. (Parent & Deephouse, 2007) However other equally important stakeholders include the event organiser's own staff. Parent and Deephouse (2007) further identify the local community (for human and physical resources), international governance (for participants), media (for image creation), and international sports federations (for rules of the game) as important stakeholders as well.

4. Research Methodology

For the purpose of this research, qualitative research methods were used. Creswell (2007) describes qualitative research as a process whose outcomes rely on the collection of rich descriptive data in respect of a phenomenon or context under study. Primary data was collected through interviews which were conducted using a predetermined interview schedule. Face to face interviews were conducted with respondents which allowed for direct interaction with the researcher. Interviews aid in permitting a greater interpretation of social phenomena in comparison to that obtained from quantitative methods. (Gill et al., 2008) The interview schedule which was used to conduct the interviews comprised of a list of open-ended questions and topics to be covered in order to determine the perspectives of stakeholders on the development of sport tourism in Gabon. Responses to the interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Interview respondents were selected based on their involvement and participation in sport tourism and mega-events in Gabon, as well as their specific involvement in the hosting of the 2012 AFCON. A range of respondents were selected in order to obtain a broad overview of stakeholder perspectives. In order to analyse the collected data, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis.

The phases of conducting thematic analysis as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) were utilised. This process involves reading the textual data, identification of themes in the data, coding the emerging themes, reviewing the themes and then interpreting the content and structure of the themes. (Guest et al., 2012) According to Vaismoradi et al. (2013), the final phase of thematic analysis presents the last occasion of data analysis and the creativeness of the researcher for showcasing the results in relation to a story line, a model, or a map.

5. Key Findings

Respondents who were interviewed for the study were asked to provide insights on their perspectives of sport tourism development in Gabon. For the purposes of this article, the focus will be on the factors that encourage the city of Libreville to organise sport tourism events such as AFCON, future opportunities for organising sport tourism events in Libreville, lessons learnt from hosting AFCON in Libreville for the tourism industry, and how the sport event industry can be strengthened to support tourism and hospitality development in Libreville.

5.1. Enablers for the Organisation of Sport Tourism Events in Libreville

Most of the respondents who were interviewed felt that the main factor encouraging the city to pursue the organising and hosting of sport events was the potential contribution to the economic growth of the city. The themes which emerged in terms of the contribution of sport tourism to the economy of the city were increased turnover, branding, infrastructural development, tourist arrivals and visitor spending. Of these themes, the one that was accentuated by most respondents was infrastructure development in terms of stadia development and other infrastructure such as the building of roads and hotels and other developmental projects. A respondent from AFCON stated:

"Built infrastructure, increased hotel capacity, sport infrastructure, road infrastructure, ambulance and hospital equipment advancement, security reinforcement. Everything that has been built for the AFCON stayed in the country".

Barget and Gouget (2012) state that sport mega-events can produce substantial economic impacts for host destinations, especially due to increased number of tourist arrivals. A respondent from an accommodation establishment supported this by stating:

"In a general point of view, sporting events usually attract a lot of people. People come in mass to attend sport events in Libreville, especially the AFCON. They will make use of the local products; they will spend on catering, accommodation etc."

Sport tourists are inclined to spend money on items such as food and shopping while attending matches which is their primary motivation to travel. (Gibson et al., 2003; Roche et al., 2013) A case in point is visitors who travelled to South Africa for the purposes of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ who also spent their money on shopping, food and drink and leisure. (Tichaawa et al., 2015) They also spent on additional things ranging from flight tickets to entry visas, accommodation and catering, transport and other leisure activities during their stay. This was also evident in research conducted by Tichaawa and Harilal (2016) which showed that sport tourists attending a golf event in South Africa engaged in a range of additional tourism activities crucial to generating socio-economic benefits for the country including shopping, trading and dining at local restaurants. More direct sport event expenses include event tickets, sport and event merchandise and other event-related articles. These spending patterns are illustrative of AFCON as well as expressed in the respondent's quote.

Two stakeholders from a hotel establishment and a sport authority highlighted an upturn in local operators' turnover including tourism and hospitality-related services such as hotels, car rentals agencies, catering and sport bars, amongst others. They emphasised that local companies appeared to record high turnover during the event period and are consequently able to market themselves to a greater extent. One of the hotel respondents highlighted the manner in which sport tourism events such as AFCON contribute to the economic growth of Libreville in this quote:

"By attracting a lot of tourists, hotels, restaurants and transport sectors increase their turnover"

Additionally, in terms of the potential positive economic impacts encouraging the city of Libreville to organise sport events, another theme that emerged from the interviews was the opportunity for the branding of the country, as stated in the following quote:

"The event shows the image of Gabon overseas and more people come in the country and it increases its economy. The AFCON, the Marathon, the Tropical Amissa Bongo or any other sport event allows people to discover Gabon as they tour around all the provinces of Gabon"

Respondents felt that staging sport events generates opportunities for different types of businesses in the area. The following table illustrates how respondents viewed businesses could leverage opportunities from sport tourism events hosted in Libreville.

Table 1. Views on how opportunities related to sport tourism events in Libreville can be leveraged by local businesses

Establishment	Responses
Hotels	• Increased demand for shuttle services • Airline companies • Increased occupancy rates in hotels • Travel agencies • Small and medium enterprises
Sport	• Increased demand for hospitality services • Maximising international event broadcasting and free media advertising • Larger market share for local companies in a range of event-related industries
Tourism	• Small and medium enterprises in terms of hospitality services • Sponsors and leveraging off their marketing investment • Construction companies that enhance tourism infrastructure development

5.2. Opportunities for Organising Sport Events in Libreville

Most interviewed respondents felt that Libreville should capitalise on the opportunity to have an annual calendar of events. This fixture of events could help to promote the image of the city, assist with the development of event infrastructure, and position Libreville as a favourable tourism destination. One respondent confidently stated the following:

"Every time we host an event in a very well, organised manner, it will have an impact – more sponsors will want to associate their image to our event. People thought that in Africa there is only war and poverty, so we have to bring another image through the hosting of sport events"

Respondents in the study did not place much emphasis on the development of a strong working relationship between sport federations and event organisers in Libreville. This shows a clear opportunity for the industries to develop this relationship in order to contribute to the sustainable development of sport tourism. The need for this collaboration is clearly shown in the following quote from the president of a hotel in the city:

"They must create a platform within which they will decide to cooperate to promote the image of the country. If there is no cooperation, every structure will try to gain profit on its own, but if they were all trying to work together, tourism by now would take another turn"

The general feeling amongst respondents was that opportunities for developing sport events in Libreville are hindered by the unaffordability of Gabon as a tourism destination. Respondents working at hotels stated that the majority of their occupants during the AFCON were business travellers or sport delegations and participants and that very few occupants were leisure travellers because of high costs. A hotel manager in Libreville stated the following:

"Tourism is very expensive in Gabon. Gabon is indeed one of the most expensive countries of Central Africa. We must reduce the cost"

These high costs are concerning in view of the findings of Mohan (2010) which indicates that the accommodation and flight costs are one of the strongest influences on the decision to travel to a sporting event.

5.3. Lessons Learned from Hosting AFCON in Libreville for the Tourism Industry

- The data gathered through the interviews noted a number of lessons that were learned through the hosting of the AFCON tournament. One of these lessons is that currently Libreville does not have sufficient infrastructure to support the sustainable development of sport tourism. Although AFCON contributed to the upgrading of certain infrastructure required for the hosting of the event, there is a lack of supporting infrastructure that will be beneficial for the long-term. The organisation of the event required sizable government funding to provide the necessary facilities and such a large investment needs to be justified by revenue from ticket sales, revenue from expected visitors as well as business participation. In order to achieve this, the host destination needs to work closely with the organising committee and the departments of sport and tourism to ensure that the infrastructure will attract more events in the future in order to stimulate economic growth and maintain a viable tourism sector.

- Another lesson that was learned was that the success of a sport mega-event relies heavily on the availability of necessary skills and that there is a clear skills shortage in Libreville, as illustrated in this quote: *"People are not trained and many of the challenges faced are human. Due to the lack of trained human resources, a number of Gabonese people were employed with fake certificates in the hospitality industry. Because of this, international staff members had to be brought in"*

- In order to successfully host future sport mega-events, it would be necessary for the government to collaborate with relevant stakeholders such as educators and private sector agencies to develop and finance education programs for sport tourism skills development.

- Most of the interview respondents agreed that one of the most significant lessons that has been learned through the hosting of major sporting events is that planning, budgeting and expected revenue need to be carefully managed as in any business venture. The most effective way to do this would be through closer collaboration between sport federations and event organisers in the area. Supporting this, a respondent from a local hotel stated the following: *"The hospitality, sport and tourism industries should be reorganised and work hand in hand. Before an established partnership can do anything, there must be partnership creation".*

- This statement is supported by the case of sport tourism development in Australia where a strategic alliance has been created between national sports organisations, tour operators and the Australian Rugby Union. The results of this partnership have included a range of both intangible and tangible financial benefits. Furthermore, the alliance has allowed for benefits to extend to other key stakeholders of sport events including fans and host governments and destinations. The formation of this partnership was done using a bottom up approach, whereby stakeholders enter into partnerships of their own volition and the flexible structure of the alliance has made it sustainable and has assisted with previous sport tourism market failure in the country. (Kennelly & Toohey, 2014)

5.4. Strengthening of the Sport Event Industry to Support Tourism Development in Libreville

Based on interview responses, the sport event industry in Libreville can be strengthened through the provision of additional infrastructure; the development of an organisation that incorporates the sport, tourism and hospitality industries so that they work together and take a collaborative approach to sport tourism development; the provision of skills development and training programs for individuals working in the sport, event and tourism sectors; and the removal of corruption in organisations. Unfortunately, as Svensson (2005) underscores, corruption is rife in developing countries. In the case of Libreville, respondents felt that all government departments were competing for funding and that this funding was often not used for the reason it was intended. A respondent from a sport organisation stated the following: *"Each department wants the funding, but it will go to people's pockets and not the actual project"*.

Another way to strengthen the sport event industry would be through increased marketing activities around sport mega-events. Gabon has the prospects of being a premier tourism destination, both internationally and domestically, through sport tourism. However, presently there is a lack of a marketing strategy and a tourism development strategy, particularly in relation to product development. Although one of the main objectives of hosting events is destination profiling, interview respondents did not view events currently hosted in Gabon as opportunities to promote the country as a tourism destination. When considering the sport tourism event leveraging model developed by Chalip (2004), a host destination's brand should be showcased in event advertising, which can be used to promote the host destination's features.

6. Conclusions

Given the increasing body of knowledge on the impacts of sport tourism and its development in developing nations, and its consequent use for socio-economic development, this study sought to determine stakeholder perspectives of sport tourism development in Gabon using the country's hosting of the 2012 AFCON as a case study. Specifically, it aimed to understand the factors that encouraged the city of Libreville to organise sport tourism events and the associated opportunities for the host destination. Furthermore, it attempted to understand the lessons learned from hosting AFCON for tourism development and what is required to strengthen the sport event industry in order to better support tourism development in the host destination.

In terms of the factors which encourage Libreville to develop itself as a sport tourism destination, the themes which emerged from the data were an upturn in turnover and visitor spending, increased tourist arrivals, infrastructural development, ancillary service development, and branding and sponsorship opportunities. The results of the research show that the main motive for hosting sport mega-events was for economic growth and the perceived change in the face of Libreville through

infrastructure development. The data collected showed that there are a number of opportunities linked to the organisation of sport tourism events in Libreville including the development of an annual sport tourism events calendar, with a mega-event such as AFCON hosted occasionally together with more regularly occurring annual events; the collaboration and development of a working relationship between sport, hospitality, and tourism sectors as well as event organisers; and the development of a tourism product in Gabon that is affordable to leisure travellers.

When considering the lessons learned from the hosting of events in Libreville, and AFCON in particular, the most commonly stated response by interview respondents was that in order to develop a sustainable sport tourism industry in the city, there needs to be further infrastructure development, particularly in terms of ancillary services. Along with this, the government, in partnership with educators and the private sector needs to address the issue of the lack of skills in the sport, tourism, events and hospitality industries by providing skills development and training programmes to local residents. Most respondents who were interviewed felt that one of the biggest lessons learned was the need for a consolidated organisation including representatives from the sport, events, tourism and hospitality organisations in order to plan and organise future sport mega-events in a manner that promotes sustainable sport tourism development. The addressing of the above lessons, as well as the eradication of corruption within organisations in Gabon would assist with the strengthening of the sport tourism event industry. It is further recommended that further research is required to include a broader range of stakeholders and consistently monitor and evaluate the impacts of the sport tourism events in Libreville, Gabon.

The research conducted in this study illustrate that sport tourism and the hosting of sport events can be used as a tool for socio-economic development in developing countries such as Gabon if managed and planned in a sustainable manner. One of the key success factors is to develop partnerships and alliances in the sport tourism industry and in the hosting of major sport events in particular. Additionally, they include a range of stakeholders in order to ensure the spread of potential benefits.

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